

One Price in Print, Another in Practice

(Continued from page 16)

we were not "stung" to anything like the extent to which the average and inexperienced shopper suffers. For the bed could be reasonably reckoned as a \$6.50 article, although one expert states that it can be bought as low as \$5.50. Therefore we were actually penalized, at most, less than \$1.50, though the aviating mattress would have bettered this had we not been obdurate.

Upon subsequent consideration of the purchase as delivered, by the side of the advertising picture, one of The Tribune purchasers, with a witness, revisited the northern haunts of Piser and called the attention of the salesman who had waited upon him to

the painful discrepancy between fact as represented by the purchased bed and fiction as represented by the picture. The salesman was ready for him, and this dialogue ensued:

"I didn't sell you the bed, anyway."

"I paid you for it."

"Dunno you paid for it. I sold it to the other fellow."

"Well, is it the bed in the advertisement?"

"It's the bed you bought," was the sullen reply. "You got what you paid for."

"Whether we did or not, we asked for the bed advertised at \$6.98, and you told us we were getting it."

"So you did get it."

"Why don't you look up the ad. and compare the cut with the kind of bed you sold us?"

"When was the ad?"

"Monday's paper. Will you look it up?"

"He wouldn't. He had lost interest. We had ceased to be customers. We were only 'beefers.'"

Another firm which deals extensively by the picture method is J. Michaels, 182 Smith St., Brooklyn, who terms

himself "Friend of the People." What it costs the People to have Mr. Michaels for their friend on the installment plan has already been indicated in a previous article on installment clothing. The Michaels and Pythias arrangement is no more advantageous in the matter of furniture. Attracted by the display of pleasing pictures in the Sunday American (Mr. Hearst, being something of a friend of the People himself, is naturally a friend of the friend of the People—at advertising rates) we made an amicable call upon Mr. Michaels, with his pleasing pictures in hand.

Nearly every item among the pleasing pictures were able to identify in the salesrooms; but the prices were not so pleasing as the pictures. Whether attached to chairs, rugs, buffets, or parlor furniture, they appeared to have suffered an abrupt attack of elephantiasis. They were swollen out of all resemblance to the figures presented in Mr. Michaels's paper.

Selecting one of the most easily identified of the imaginary portraits of furniture, a so-called solid oak table with a "massive pedestal" and "shaped

feet," we endeavored to purchase it for the advertised price of \$7.98. Strange to relate, the salesman could produce nothing under \$14.00.

"You can't buy a dining table for less than that," he said pityingly. "We never have any call for anything cheaper."

"Then how comes it that you advertise a \$7.98 article?"

"His answer came pat and ready. 'We're all sold out on that.'"

As the sale had begun only two days previous, this seemed unusual, particularly in view of the fact that the store "never had any call" for the cheap table. The same phenomenon became apparent when other lines of furniture were asked for. Two days later we returned and located a table which was quite obviously the one pictured at \$7.98 in the advertisement. The resemblance didn't extend to the price, which was \$14.00. Nothing cheaper to be had, said the salesman, although there were several specimens on the floor marked at lower prices. On learning that we wished to pay cash, he offered a 20 per cent special reduction, bringing the price down to \$11.20, which we paid.

Even at that, Mr. Michaels's newspaper-proffered friendship was dear. The most liberal appraisal on the table gives it a retail rating of \$9 maximum, while another expert considers that \$8 would be as much as a reasonable dealer should ask. The table is poor stuff, he says.

The most startling instance of price-switching anywhere encountered was at the Ludwig Baumann & Co. store, 144 West 125th Street. Under the clericalness of a salesman named Weiss, the Tribune investigators were taken to the second floor, where, amidst a number of parlor suites, one was seen which was a duplicate of a set on sale at the Eighth Avenue store of Ludwig Baumann for \$69.74. The suite, before which the Tribune purchasers halted, carried the red tag which, the salesman explained, indicates an advertised article. And sure enough, it had been advertised in the World of two days previous, as a "genuine leather parlor suite" of sofa, arm chair and arm rocker, regular price \$100, for sale at \$69.74. No other advertising of the Baumann concern at that time in any manner corresponded with the goods offered by Mr. Weiss.

Judge of the shoppers' amazement when the salesman, after examining the ticket, announced the price as \$125.00. Just about 1400 advance over the advertised price. Doubtful as to whether they had understood correctly, the Tribune representatives asked again. The price was calmly repeated: \$125.00. Still doubting, they looked up the World advertisement. There could be no doubt of the identity of the set described. As a concession, however, a "teacher's discount" of 10% was offered to the purchaser. Just how The Tribune in its advertisement of the Baumann concern at that time in any manner corresponded with the goods offered by Mr. Weiss.

At S. Baumann & Co.'s, 48th St. and 8th Avenue, there was the same kind of disparity between advertised prices and sales prices as had been experienced at the other stores.

Prices for springs were then quoted. An Engländer-Witt Edge close-woven wire spring, No. 96, was quoted at \$14.75, but this was subject to no cash discount, because it was priced so low, the clerk said. As to that, there is room for reasonable difference of opinion. The price does not seem startlingly cheap in view of the fact that Kellner Bros., on Sixth Avenue, carry

precisely the same spring at \$11.00. Taking the bed with the spring, it is evident that Goldberg's has not changed its spots since it was evicted from the columns of The Tribune.

In stating their advertisement, "We're offering some wonderful values," Finkenberg's furniture store, at 121st Street and Third Avenue, is quite accurate. The store indubitably offers the values, both in newspaper advertising and in window-bait. That's as far as it goes. Try to take advantage of the offer and the store takes the advantage of you. You may get the goods advertised, but not, if you duplicate The Tribune's experience, at the price advertised.

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"What is the price of this bed?" Mr. Silverstone was asked.

"That's thirty-four fifty."

For a thirty-dollar bed reduced (in the window) to 19.98 this seemed excessive. The fact that the private code number indicated \$27 as the minimum price in the store's sliding scale was not reassuring.

"Haven't you anything in this style for less money?" asked the investigator.

"No. This is a very high-class bed. The price is going up all the time. The longer you wait the more you'll have to pay."

"But I'm sure I saw beds of this kind at less money."

"Oh, we've got cheaper beds, of course," he admitted, and led the way to a much inferior line. Even these were priced at \$25.

If they had anything like the bed in the window advertised at \$19.98, Mr. Silverstone didn't know of it. The window-sign "Everything Sold at Sale Prices" didn't seem to extend its sphere of influence to the upper floor.

Not all the local installment furniture houses are crooked. There are some—very few—which do an honest business. These do not juggle prices; they do not display window bait; they do not publish mythical pictures or mythical figures in the newspapers. They sell, as any other decent store does, at a specified figure.

Any store that does otherwise is a store to shun. If you are going to buy from advertised representations, whether pictured in the papers or exhibited in show windows, see to it that the facts match the representations. If they do not, if one price is offered and another asked, remember this: that of two prices you will always get the worse.

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A "MASSIVE" BED AT PISER'S EMPORIUM BEFORE AND AFTER BUYING



BEFORE



AFTER

article is as inadvisable as it is dishonest.

The purchase was made on the installment plan. Appraisal proved it to be one of the very worst bargains that has ever come into The Tribune office in the course of a long campaign dealing with bad bargains. The framework of the chair is birch, poorly mahoganyized. The seats are stuffed with an amorphous mixture of excelsior and sawdust which will flatten out after the springs begin to give. The three pieces, offered (in print) for \$69.74, represented (in print) to be worth \$100, and actually sold at \$161.25, might by a magnanimous soul be allowed a maximum retail appraisal of \$60. But the consensus of expert opinion estimates it at about \$65. Establishing the fact that the Ludwig Baumann & Co. are not in business exclusively for their health!

When, in the course of an investigation of the installment clothing business, Tribune shoppers had purchased at Kelly's, 263 Sixth Avenue, a mis-represented coat at a price well above what it was worth, a cordial invitation was extended to come in later and look at the furniture bargains. Of course, the store people had no suspicion of the purpose of the purchasers. Curiously enough, the acceptance of the invitation roused little interest in the salesman assigned to them, who assumed the listless and bored air proper (in a certain kind of store) to service upon "lookers" who will probably not develop into buyers. Herein the salesman did some poor guessing. Being there to buy, the visitors priced a Morris chair, an exhibition of good faith which roused the salesman from his torpor sufficiently to state the price as \$23.00. This must have cost him some effort, as the real price, attested by the ticket on the leg, was \$10. Having named his price, he stuck to it, in spite of several efforts to beat him down. Finally, one of the investigators called his attention to the tag.

"This says \$10."

"Oh," said the salesman, wearily. "That's for the frame. The cushions are extra."

In proof of which he turned the cushion, revealing with the suddenness and surprise of a jack-in-the-box which was a duplicate of a set on sale at the Eighth Avenue store of Ludwig Baumann for \$69.74. The suite, before which the Tribune purchasers halted, carried the red tag which, the salesman explained, indicates an advertised article. And sure enough, it had been advertised in the World of two days previous, as a "genuine leather parlor suite" of sofa, arm chair and arm rocker, regular price \$100, for sale at \$69.74. No other advertising of the Baumann concern at that time in any manner corresponded with the goods offered by Mr. Weiss.

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